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MEDICAL SERVICE IN THE USSR'S FAR NORTH

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The Party and the government are paying a great deal of attention to the development of the economy of the Far North, and to raising the material well-being and cultural standards of the peoples living there. Over the years, the Soviet authorities have changed the appearance of this vast border region to such an extent that it is hardly recognizable. Kolkhozes, trapping stations, and fishing artels have been supplied with the most modern machines and devices which not only make the work easier, but sharply increase productivity as well. Throughout the broad expanse of the northern lands, a vast network of schools, hospitals, kindergartens, nurseries, and village reading rooms has been set up and, at the same time, many houses have been built.

Before the October Revolution, there were only 7 hospitals and 25 feldsher stations in all the cities and large villages of the Far North. These were staffed by 11 physicians and 25 feldshers. There were no specialized therapeutic institutions, dispensaries, or maternity homes. As a result, epidemics, poverty, and famine took a large toll of human lives.

During the Soviet regime, about 200 hospitals, a significant number of medical aid stations for ambulatory patients, about 1,000 feldsher-midwife stations, and 12 specialized dispensaries with facilities for the prolonged treatment of patients have been established in the various national okrugs. In addition, dozens of maternity homes, 450 permanent and seasonal children's nurseries, sanitary-epidemiological stations, malaria stations, and air-ambulance stations [literally, sanitary-aviation stations] are operating.

Every year, the government allots large amounts for the construction of new therapeutic institutions. In the Yakutsk ASSR, 28 hospitals and dispensaries containing almost 1,000 beds began to operate between 1945 and 1953. A significant number of medical institutions were also set up in Krasnoyarsk and Khabarovsk krais and Tyumen' and other oblasts.

The air-ambulance stations have been of great importance in furnishing medical service to people living in remote regions. During the past year, the specialists from these stations alone performed about 600 surgical operations and treated more than 27,000 persons. More than 2,000 patients were flown to okrug and oblast centers.

In addition to the permanent network of therapeutic-prophylactic institutions, mobile medical detachments consisting of a physician and two intermediate medical workers have been created in recent years. Their main function is to provide medical service to the nomadic reindeer herders, who travel with their herds. They also carry out prophylactic surveys. In the Khanty-Mansi National Okrug, two such medical detachments examined more than 5,000 persons during the past year. They record all instances of illnesses and organize whatever treatment is necessary. The physicians of the Nenets National Okrug have successfully established a dispensary method of serving their people. Specialists from the Amdermink Rayon Hospital visited the reindeer kolkhozes; also, brigades equipped with X-ray apparatus and a clinic-diagnostic laboratory traveled through the region. The physicians investigated the state of health of more than 200 persons and studied the working and living conditions of the people living in the kolkhozes.

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Numerous groups of physicians and intermediate medical workers preserve the health of the population in the Far North. Physicians M. A. Fedorovich, A. M. Yakimanova, A. F. Alexandrov, and V. M. Sokolova have worked in this field for 20 years. A. A. Korolev, Meritorious Physician of the RSFSR, has directed the Nes' Medical Sector for 22 years. Experienced public health leaders such as P. T. Moskovkin, Head of the Yamalo-Nenets National Okrug Health Division, and M. A. Sol'berg, Head of the Nenets National Okrug Health Division, both of whom are native to the region, have come to prominence.

However, in a number of the national okrugs and rayons of the Far North the medical service is not adequate to satisfy the present needs of the population. Since there are still no okrug hospitals in the Aginsk Buryat Mongol and Koryak national okrugs, the village, rayon, and sector hospitals are deprived of necessary organizational and methodological guidance.

Some of the rayon hospitals are not in a position to furnish the people with specialized medical care in the basic fields of clinical medicine. For example, in the Koryak National Okrug, each rayon hospital has only about ten beds. This is not enough to establish the necessary basic departments.

Another serious deficiency is the underdevelopment of the specialized dispensary network. In the Aginsk Buryat Mongol, Nenets, and Yamalo-Nenets national okrugs there are no antituberculosis dispensaries, and in the Taymyr and Khanty-Mansi national okrugs there are no dermatovenerological dispensaries.

The leaders of some of the kray, oblast, and okrug divisions of the public health service are still reluctant to decide definitely what the field of activity of the air-ambulance system should be. They have not organized air-ambulance stations at the various rayon hospitals and are still not making full use of aviation as a means of providing specialized medical care to the rural population.

The problem of cadres is, likewise, far from being solved. The present contract system of dispatching and distributing medical workers within the national okrugs makes it impossible to avoid rapid turnover of the medical personnel in the cadres. In the rayons of the Far North, there is a yearly turnover of physicians of almost one third and just slightly less for intermediate medical workers. This, naturally, has a bad influence on the quality of therapeutic and prophylactic activity. It also hinders the detailed study of the working and living conditions of the people and of the causes of the most widespread diseases and delays the development and execution of the complex of sanitation measures. One method of solving this problem is to train members of the local population as medical cadres. However, the native inhabitants of the rayons of the Far North are still not attracted to the medical institutes and feldsher-midwife schools. One of the reasons for this is the absence of boarding and residential facilities for students at a number of the Siberian and Far Eastern institutes. The public health organizations should make it their business to establish dormitories for this purpose at the educational institutions.

There is another great deficiency in the work of the cadres. The physicians, feldshers, and nurses rarely gather together for meetings, conferences, 10-day programs, or seminars. Because there is no organized exchange of experience, the specialists from the kray, oblast, and okrug hospitals give little assistance to young doctors engaged in practical work. Nor, as a rule, are the young doctors sent to advanced training and specialization courses for physicians because, in the majority of cases, they will only be working in the national okrugs for about 3 years.

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The leaders of the local public health organizations have made little use of such a proven means of educating medical workers as the sending of brigades of specialists from the oblast or okrug centers to the rayon and sector hospitals in order to train the physicians at these local institutions in various related fields. This would indeed raise the quality of therapeutic and prophylactic work, make specialized medical assistance more accessible to the people, and guarantee the interchangeability of physicians. This should be done to the extent that a surgeon could take the place of a gynecologist, or a therapist that of a pediatrician, and vice-versa.

The medical and scientific-research institutes could be of great assistance to the physicians of the Far North in their daily activities. Unfortunately, little is being done at present. No work has been done on regional pathology, more effective methods of treating and preventing the various diseases which are due to local conditions, immunization problems, vitamin requirement norms for both indigenous and transient inhabitants of these regions, proper diet, special blood transfusion problems, and a number of other matters.

All these problems will have to be solved by the combined efforts of the Ministry of Public Health RSFSR and the public health organizations of the autonomous republics, krais, and oblasts of the Far North.

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